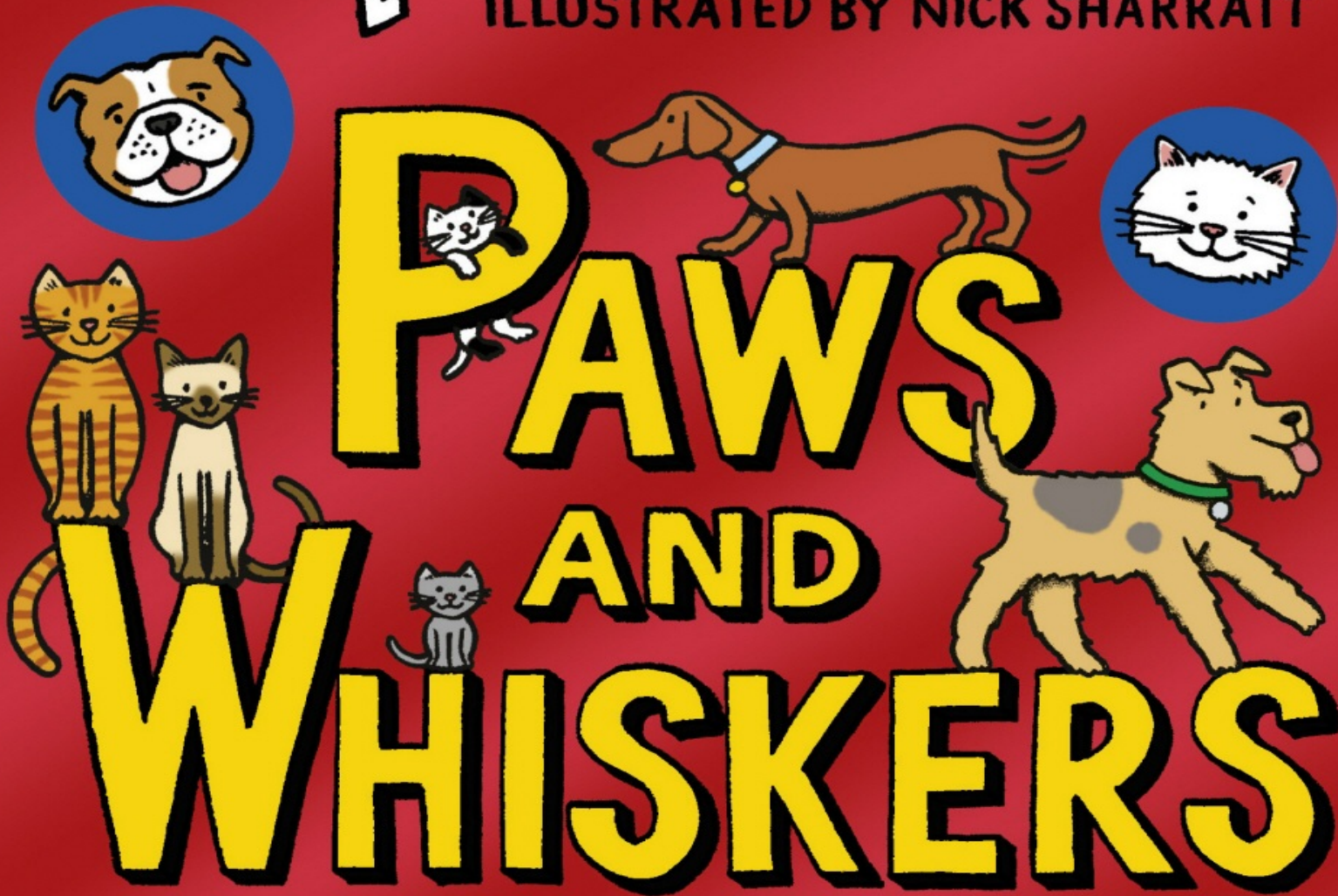


CHOSEN BY
Jacqueline Wilson
ILLUSTRATED BY NICK SHARRATT



PAWS AND WHISKERS



In association with

Battersea
Dogs & Cats Home



ANIMAL TALES FROM JACQUELINE WILSON,
MICHAEL MORPURGO, ENID BLYTON AND MORE!

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About the Book

This special anthology features the very best stories about cats and dogs from the world of children's literature, chosen by bestselling author and Battersea Dogs & Cats Home Ambassador, Jacqueline Wilson.

Alongside a brand-new story by Jacqueline herself, this beautiful collection includes extracts from treasured classics such as *The Hundred and One Dalmatians* and *The Incredible Journey*, modern favourites like *The Knife of Never Letting Go* and *The Killer Cat*, and specially written pieces from today's best-loved children's writers, including Michael Morpurgo, Malorie Blackman, Philip Pullman and lots more.

From the elegant cat who loves the ballet and the little witch's kitten who doesn't want to be bad, to the poodle who needs a haircut and the most famous spotty dogs of all, this is a book to treasure, share and return to for ever.

CHOSEN BY
Jacqueline Wilson



**PAWS
AND
WHISKERS**

**ANIMAL TALES FROM JACQUELINE WILSON,
MICHAEL MORPURGO, ENID BLYTON AND MORE!**



**ILLUSTRATED BY
NICK SHARRATT**



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CATS

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THE WEREPUPPY

By Jacqueline Wilson (Puffin, 1993).
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FOREWORD



Do you have a cat or a dog? When I was a little girl, I desperately wanted a pet, but we lived in a council flat and there was a strict rule that we weren't allowed to have animals. I suppose we *might* have been allowed to have a goldfish, but they're not the most responsive pets in the world. I wanted a furry little animal I could cuddle.

I made a big fuss of my best friend's cat and begged to take my godmother's dog for a walk, but it wasn't quite the same as having my *own* pet. I started collecting little china ornaments of cats and dogs, who went for walks up and down my bedroom windowsill. Then my mum gave me a toy Pekinese dog for a special summer holiday present. He was life-size and very realistic-looking. I adored him on sight and called him Vip – short for Very Important Person. He slept in my arms at night and I carried him everywhere during the day. Not to school, of course – I didn't want to be teased. But Vip came to the shops with me and out to play with special friends. He even attended birthday parties – and got fed lots of extra sausages on sticks!

I vowed that as soon as I was grown up I'd have a real dog and a real cat – but it's actually taken me a long time to achieve my ambition. I've lived in small flats where it wouldn't be fair to keep a pet, and then I've travelled a great deal, without anyone at home to look after a little animal. But now I'm much more of a home-bird, and at long last I've got the right sort of house for pets.

I decided to start with cats, as they're more independent than dogs and don't mind too much if you have to go out to give a talk or do a book-signing. I started to research all the different breeds of cat and considered having a pedigree kitten. But then I thought about all the unwanted little cats in rescue centres – small Tracy Beaker type cats, desperate to find a loving home.

I went to the wonderful Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and wandered around their spacious cat cabins, looking for someone really special. There were cats of all sizes and colours and types, so I was totally spoiled for choice. I went from one to another, liking them all, wondering how I was ever going to choose. And then, right at the end, I saw a small grey and white kitten – and I fell instantly in love.

My boy Jacob is four now, and the sweetest, most affectionate cat ever. I've given him a little sister, Lily, also from Battersea. She came to us as a very bedraggled kitten, who'd been abandoned and had been very ill. She still has a few problems but you'd never know it – she's the most lively, funny little girl who dashes around everywhere. She totally adores Jacob and cuddles up close to him at night. He's very protective of her. When she first started going outdoors, he trotted along beside her, watching her every step – and when she suddenly darted up a tree and got stuck, he followed her and demonstrated how to climb down in a tactful and brotherly manner.

In a little while I think it will be time to get a dog at last – a small one who doesn't mind cats. I'll go to Battersea and see who I can find, and then my family will be complete.

Jacqueline Wilson

CAT STORIES



LEONIE'S PET CAT



by Jacqueline Wilson

I had great fun writing Leonie's Pet Cat. I thought it would be a very short story, just a few pages, but it got longer and longer. It's more like a tiny novel now. I rather like Leonie. I might write some more about her one day.

If you've read my book Clean Break, you'll recognize one of the other characters in the story – a certain Jenna Williams. She's a children's author like me. She looks rather like me too (apart from her earrings), and now she has a kitten called Lulu who bears more than a passing resemblance to my little Lily.

Jw



🐾 **LEONIE'S PET CAT** 🐾

It's so awful being the new girl at school.

'Don't worry, Leonie, I'm sure you'll make heaps of friends,' said Mum.

I *had* heaps of friends at my old school. I didn't have to try to *make* friends. They were just there – Maddy and Kas and Janie. We'd been playing together ever since we crayoned cards and finger-painted in Form One. But that was in the old days, when I lived with Dad as well as Mum. We had a proper house, with a bedroom for me (blue, with a rainbow painted on one wall) and a bedroom for my little brother Jumbo (yellow, with lions and tigers and elephants paraded on a frieze).

Now I hardly ever get to see Dad. I see all too much of Jumbo because we have to share this titchy little bedroom (*beige*, because we haven't got the time or the money to decorate just yet). Jumbo drives me crackers because he messes about with all my things. He tries to draw with my felt tips and nearly always breaks them. He pulls all my Jenna Williams stories off their special shelf and scrumples the pages. He only likes *Thomas the Tank Engine* books. He natters all the time, talking to his irritating imaginary friend Harry. He even keeps me awake at night, wheezing and snuffling because of his asthma.

Mum worried about *Jumbo* making friends. He's always been an odd little boy, very small and skinny, with big sticky-out ears and a high-pitched voice. I think the boys in the infants at our new school *do* pick on him a bit, but Jumbo doesn't care. He plays in the Wendy House with all the girls and they make a big fuss of him and invite him to their pretend tea parties. They even lay an extra cup and plate for nonexistent Harry.

I can't seem to make any kind of friend, girls or boys. My new teacher, Miss Horsefield, told Keira Summers to be my friend and look after me the first day. Keira was all nicey-nicey to me in front of Miss Horsefield, and lent me her spare pen and showed me the way they do dates and margins in this class – but when I followed her out into the playground at lunch time, she hissed, 'Push off, new girl,' and ran away to play with her own friends.

That's the trouble. Everyone in our class has got friends already. They're all in little groups and gangs, and none of them seem to want me. There's one girl I really like – Julie. She's got lovely long fair hair and she wears five friendship bracelets on one wrist, and every now and then if she sees me looking she smiles at me.

'Well, smile back and make friends with her,' said Mum.

Mum doesn't understand. It's so difficult. You can't just march up to someone, grin like a lunatic, and say, 'Will you be my friend?' And even if Julie *wanted* to be my friend, she's already got all the *other* friends – horrid Keira and Rosie and Emily and Harpreet and Anya. They always play together and whisper stuff and write things down in a special book. I've tried edging up close to see exactly what they're doing, but they always go into a huddle, turning their backs on me.

But then one day Julie looked up and saw me, and she smiled again. 'Hi, Leonie,' she said.

'Hi, Julie,' I said. My mouth was so dry my voice came out in a squeak.

I hesitated, fidgeting from one foot to the other. The other girls all stared at me.

'Look, buzz off, Leonie, we're having a private meeting of our club,' said Keira.

I swallowed. 'Can't I be in your club?'

The girls all looked at each other. Keira wrinkled her nose. 'Our club's full up,' she said.

But Julie gave her a little push. 'Oh, don't be a meanie, Keira. Let's have Leonie in the club too,' she said.

'No!' said Keira.

'Yes!' said Julie. 'I vote Leonie gets to be a member. Hands up everyone who agrees!'

Rosie put her hand up. Then Anya and Harpreet. Emily's hand hovered, halfway up. Keira glared at her and she put it down again.

'There – Emily and I say no,' said Keira.

'But us four say yes, so we win,' said Julie. 'Welcome to the Pet Girls Club, Leonie!'

'Thank you!' I said.

'We have special badges and we swap photos of our pets and write about them in our book,' said Julie. 'I've got a Jack Russell terrier called Bobo. He's terribly naughty but I love him to bits.'

'I've just got a budgie called Joey, but he's very clever and can go up and down his ladder for titbits,' said Rosie.

'I've got a baby rabbit called Woffles. She's got floppy ears. She's so cute,' said Harpreet.

'I've got a hamster called Twitchy,' said Anya, twitching her own nose.

'I've got two cats called Salt and Pepper,' said Emily. 'They're tortoiseshell.'

'I've got a Labrador called Dustbin because he eats all sorts of rubbish,' said Keira. She looked at me, her eyes narrowed. 'You have *got* a pet, haven't you, Leonie? Otherwise you can't be in our club whether you want to or not.'

I hesitated a fraction too long.

'There, she hasn't got a pet!' Keira crowed. 'So you've *got* to buzz off now, Leonie Loser New Girl.'

'Shut up, Keira!' said Julie. She looked at me. 'Haven't you really got any pets, Leonie? It can be any kind of animal or bird. Maybe even a goldfish . . .'

'Goldfish don't count!' said Keira. She made stupid 'o's with her mouth, imitating a goldfish. 'They don't have any personality whatsoever and you can't cuddle them.'

'You can't really cuddle budgies, but my Joey's got heaps of personality,' said Rosie indignantly.

My heart was going *thump thump thump* underneath my new school sweatshirt. I didn't have a pet, not even a goldfish – not so much as a titchy tadpole. I wanted a pet desperately. I particularly loved cats, with their soft slinky bodies and delicate ears. But I was never able to have one. First of all my dad said he was allergic to cats. Then he left us and we had to move to the flat, and we might have been able to have a cat then, only of course Jumbo is allergic to practically *everything* and Mum said she wouldn't risk it.

'Go on, Leonie, get lost,' said Keira triumphantly.

'I've got a cat,' I blurted.

'No, you haven't!'

‘Yes I have so,’ I said, but I knew I sounded doubtful.

‘I bet you mean you’ve got a toy cat,’ said Keira.

My face felt very hot. I hoped I wasn’t blushing. I had been thinking of my white furry cat nightdress-case.

Julie was looking sad. ‘Toys don’t really count, Leonie,’ she said gently.

‘She’s not a toy. She’s real. She’s not a proper cat yet, she’s a little kitten. My mum got her for me because we’ve had to move. She’s lovely. She’s got bags of personality and she’s ever so cuddly. She’s the best pet ever,’ I lied desperately.

Julie was smiling from ear to ear. ‘Why didn’t you say? What’s her name?’

I thought hard. My favourite author, Jenna Williams, had a new kitten. I’d seen a photo of it in a girls’ magazine. She’d called her Lulu.

‘My kitten’s called Lulu,’ I said.

‘Oh, that’s a lovely name,’ said Julie. ‘Right, let’s write Lulu’s name in our Pet Book. We’ll need a full description of her – and can you bring a photo of her to school tomorrow so we can stick it in our book?’

‘Yes, of course,’ I said, swallowing hard.

‘So you’re an official member of our Pet Girls Club now. Rosie, can you make Leonie one of our badges?’

Rosie cut a circle out of cardboard, inked a big PG on the front, and attached a safety pin to the back. I pinned my badge on my sweatshirt with pride. Julie showed me their special book and I admired everyone’s pets. Well, I wasn’t very enthusiastic about Dustbin the Labrador because I didn’t like Keira and it was plain she still couldn’t stand me. But I was a proper Pet Girl now, and there was nothing she could do about it.

I was friends with Rosie and Harpreet and Anya and even Emily. I was maybe almost *best* friends with Julie, because she moved her desk nearer to mine in class and sent me little notes, and when we came out of school she skipped along beside me, her long hair flying out behind her.

‘Bye, Leonie,’ she said. ‘Remember to bring Lulu’s photo tomorrow! I’m so glad you’re a Pet Girl now.’

‘So am I,’ I said.

Mum was waiting by the gate to pick me up. She was holding Jumbo’s right hand. He had his left hand out, holding invisible Harry.

‘My goodness, you look happy for once!’ said Mum. ‘Who was that pretty fair girl you were talking to?’

‘That’s Julie. She’s my friend,’ I said.

‘There! I knew you’d make friends soon enough.’

‘We’re in a secret club,’ I said proudly. Then I paused. ‘Mum? Do you think I could possibly have a kitten?’

‘Oh, Leonie! You know Jumbo’s allergic,’ she said.

‘Yes, but a kitten’s only little, and I’ll keep it out of Jumbo’s way. And I know we haven’t got much money now, but I could buy all the kitten food out of my pocket money – and I could eat my cornflakes dry and the kitten could have my milk and—’

‘No,’ said Mum.

‘But—’

‘No. I’m sorry, love, but it’s just not possible. Maybe in a few years’ time, if Jumbo’s asthma gets better.’

I didn’t need a kitten in a few years’ time. I needed a kitten right this instant.

‘They won’t let me stay in the club if I don’t have a kitten,’ I said.

‘What? Well, then, it’s a very silly club and you don’t want to be in it,’ said Mum.

~~She didn’t understand at all. I desperately wanted to stay in the Pet Girls Club. I had to keep on pretending I had a kitten. If Keira found out I’d been lying, she’d be incredibly mean and crowing and have me kicked out in a nanosecond. Julie might protest, but she wouldn’t be able to do anything about it.~~

I had to keep on lying. I couldn’t take a photo of Lulu because she didn’t exist. I wondered about saying we simply didn’t have a camera, but they’d all wonder why I couldn’t take a photo with Mum’s mobile phone. I decided to be crafty.

After tea I spent a long time in my bedroom *drawing* a kitten. I don’t want to sound as if I’m boasting, but I am very good at drawing. I found the photo of Jenna Williams with her kitten. I copied Lulu very carefully, and then coloured my picture with my best felt tips. I spent ages with the grey pen, inking in hundreds of little dashes to make the kitten look extra furry.

Jumbo kept pestering me, trying to see what I was drawing.

‘Go *away*, Jumbo. I’m busy – can’t you see?’ I said irritably.

‘Please let me look, Leonie,’ he said. ‘I love looking at your drawings. You’re so good at doing pictures.’

Jumbo has this knack of saying exactly the right thing to get his own way. I let him have a look and he clapped his hands.

‘It’s ever so good. I love that little cat,’ he said.

‘She’s my kitten. She’s called Lulu,’ I said.

‘I like her. Can I stroke her?’ said Jumbo, and he very gently touched the drawing with one finger.

‘Watch out! Wipe your hand on your T-shirt, it’s all sticky,’ I said, but I let him stroke Lulu. I even made funny purring sounds. The good thing about having an odd little brother is that you can play all sorts of pretend games and nobody teases you for being babyish.

‘I want a pet too!’ said Jumbo. ‘Draw me a pet, Leonie, go on.’

‘I’m a bit sick of drawing now. My hand aches after doing all that fur,’ I said.

Jumbo wouldn’t give up. ‘*Please* will you draw me a pet, Leonie? That way it’s fair – you can have one and I can have one. Go on. I’d absolutely love a pet.’

You just have to do whatever Jumbo wants.

‘Do you want a kitten too?’

‘No, I want a *big* pet.’

‘A dog?’

‘No, I want a pet I can ride!’

‘A horse?’

‘Bigger than a horse. I want an elephant as a pet. Go on, Leonie, draw me a great big elephant!’

So I had to draw him his elephant, and then I had to pretend to feed the elephant with buns and make trumpeting elephant noises until I was hoarse. I felt tired out when I went to bed and fell asleep almost immediately – but I woke up in the middle of the night worrying whether I would still be allowed into the Pet Girls Club without a photograph.

I kept seeing Keira saying, ‘Push off, Leonie. You’re a wicked liar and we aren’t ever letting you into our club,’ while all the other Pet Girls shook their fists at me – even Julie. I had to climb into bed with Jumbo and hug him for comfort to get back to sleep.

I took my drawing of Lulu to school with me, carefully tucked inside my project folder.

‘Hi, Leonie! Have you remembered to bring your photo?’ Julie asked, as soon as I went into the playground.

‘I haven’t got any,’ I said, sighing. ‘My dad’s got all the photos, and he lives miles and miles away now and we hardly ever see him.’

Keira narrowed her eyes suspiciously but Julie nodded, and Rosie even put her arm round me.

‘My mum and dad have split up too,’ she said. ‘It sucks, doesn’t it?’

‘Can’t you take a new photo?’ said Keira.

‘My dad’s got the camera too.’

‘Take one with your mobile, silly,’ said Keira.

‘I haven’t got a mobile. We haven’t got much money now, see,’ I said.

‘Use your mum’s mobile, then,’ Keira went on relentlessly.

‘It’s such an old granny one it can’t take photos. I wish you’d stop going on about it, Keira. Look,

I’ve done a drawing of Lulu instead,’ I said, brandishing it.

‘Oh wow!’ said Julie. ‘You’re brilliant at drawing, Leonie!’

‘I thought I was ace at drawing but you’re heaps better,’ said Harpreet.

‘It looks just like real fur!’ said Anya.

‘You’re ever so good at drawing cats,’ said Emily. ‘Do you think you could do a drawing of Salt and Pepper for me?’

Keira said nothing at all. I’d settled her hash.

I had a wonderful day at school. I sat with Julie and the other Pet Girls at lunch, and then we all huddled up together, looking through our special Pet Book. Julie produced a glue stick from her school bag and carefully stuck my picture of Lulu onto a fresh page.

Then I wrote out a detailed description of her, listing all her special likes and dislikes. I’d imagine her so vividly in my head that I found this easy-peasy.

‘Lulu likes her toy mouse, and she likes chasing her little ball, and best of all she likes climbing up the curtains, though my mum goes mad when she does it. And she *doesn’t* like loud, noisy things like vacuum cleaners, and she doesn’t like water – she cried when she fell in my bath one day,’ I said happily.

‘Oh, she sounds adorable!’ said Julie. ‘Bobo doesn’t climb the curtains, but he’s chewed all the hems, he’s so naughty. I’d love it if they could meet up, my Bobo and your Lulu – but I think he’d probably chase her. He barks like crazy when he sees our neighbour’s cat.’

‘Salt and Pepper would like Lulu – they’re very kind to little kittens. They’d be like her auntie and uncle,’ said Emily.

‘I *think* my Woffles would like Lulu,’ said Harpreet.

‘Poor Twitchy wouldn’t!’ said Anya.

‘Neither would Joey!’ said Rosie. ‘When my gran comes to stay with her cat Tabitha, we can’t even let him out of his bird cage, just in case.’

‘Dustbin would quite definitely chase her – and catch her too,’ said Keira with unnecessary relish.

‘No, he wouldn’t catch her. Lulu can run like the wind. She’d run to me and clamber up into my arms and I’d keep her safe,’ I said, feeling ultra protective of Lulu – almost forgetting she wasn’t real.

Each day I told the Pet Girls a new made-up anecdote about Lulu. I told them how she hid in the airing cupboard, how she climbed up the bookcase, how she knocked over all the photos on the mantelpiece, how she curled up beside me on my pillow at night – and they all hung on my every word.

‘Could I perhaps come to your house and play after school and meet Lulu?’ Julie asked, putting her arm round me.

I didn’t know what to say. I desperately wanted Julie to come and play, but I couldn’t produce a kitten out of thin air.

‘I’d love that, Julie, but I’m afraid Mum says I can’t have anyone round at the moment,’ I said anxiously.

‘Oh, that’s a pity,’ said Julie.

‘Why won’t your mum let you have friends round to play?’ asked Keira.

‘Oh, Keira! I expect Leonie’s mum is feeling a bit stressed,’ said Rosie. ‘I know my mum was miserable for ages. You have to make allowances.’

They were such kind girls – all except Keira. She had a way of staring at me as if she could look straight into my head and see all the lies and worries tangled up inside, like skeins of knitting wool. She was the only one who still seemed very suspicious.

I tried hard to think of some way I could convince her. That evening I rifled through the magazine again and found the photo of Jenna Williams and Lulu. I got my scissors and carefully snipped around Lulu. There, I had one little photo of my kitten! But it was clear I’d cut it out of a magazine because there were a lot of words on the back. I thought hard and then fished around in my jewellery box. I had a little silver locket Dad had bought me as a birthday present. I hadn’t worn it for ages because I didn’t like my dad any more. But now I prised it open and dug out the photo inside – one of Dad holding me when I was a baby. I snipped away at the photo of Lulu until it fitted exactly, and then slotted it in place inside the locket. It looked perfect.

I wore my locket to school the next day, tucking it away underneath my school sweatshirt. I waited until playtime, and then when all the Pet Girls gathered together I fished my locket out.

‘I *have* got a photo of Lulu after all,’ I said. ‘I just remembered last night. There’s this one in my special locket.’

I opened it up and showed them. Everyone made special ‘Aaaah’ noises – except Keira.

‘See, Keira!’ I said, thrusting the locket under her nose.

‘Mmm,’ she said.

She *still* didn’t look utterly convinced. I didn’t like the way she was looking at me. There was a weird gleam in her eye, but she didn’t say anything else.

My heart turned over the next morning at school. Keira was waving an old magazine around.

‘Look what’s in here,’ she said, opening up the magazine and stabbing at the page with her finger. All the Pet Girls peered at it curiously.

‘That’s Jenna Williams. I’ve got some of her books,’ said Julie.

‘She’s got a lovely little kitten,’ said Rosie.

‘Yes. And guess what her kitten is called!’ said Keira.

‘It says she’s called Lulu – just like your kitten, Leonie!’ said Harpreet.

‘What a coincidence,’ said Anya.

‘Coincidence, my bottom!’ said Keira. ‘It’s not a coincidence at all. Show us that picture in your locket, Leonie, go on. Then we can all see for ourselves. That *isn’t* your kitten! It’s Jenna Williams’ own cat. I *knew* you were fibbing – and then I found the photo last night in my sister’s mag. You’re just a pathetic little liar, Leonie. You can’t be in our Pet Girls Club because you haven’t got a pet – so push off!’

Julie and the others were staring at me, stunned.

‘I’m sure you’ve made a mistake, Keira,’ said Julie anxiously. ‘Let’s see your photo again, Leonie.’

‘Yes, go on, we’ll prove it,’ said Keira, tugging at the chain of my locket.

‘Stop it! You’ll break it if you’re not careful,’ I said, struggling.

It was no use. Keira’s hard little fingers scrabbled at my neck, then she opened the locket with her thumbnail and poked my photo out. She held it up triumphantly for all to see the printing on the back.

‘There! See!’ she said, her face pink with triumph.

They all saw.

‘Oh, Leonie,’ said Julie sorrowfully.

‘You fibber!’ said Emily, looking outraged.

‘I’m not, I’m not,’ I said. I couldn’t bear it. It had been so wonderful to be Julie’s friend and one of

the Pet Girls gang. I thought desperately hard.

‘All right, I did tell a little bit of a fib,’ I said. ‘Lulu isn’t exactly *my* kitten. You’re right, Keira, she does belong to Jenna Williams. But she lets me play with her lots and says she can be partly mine too.’

‘What rubbish!’ said Keira. ‘As if Jenna Williams would say that!’

‘Do you really know Jenna Williams, Leonie?’ asked Julie.

‘Yes! I know her ever so well because . . . because Jenna Williams is my granny!’ I said.

They all stared at me, mouths open.

‘She never is!’ said Keira.

‘She is, she is!’

‘Well, why didn’t you say so before?’ said Emily.

‘Because I’m not allowed. Jenna Williams – Granny – likes to be completely private. But I go to stay with her lots and I play with Lulu there,’ I insisted.

‘You must think we’re total nutcases to believe such rubbish!’ said Keira.

‘As if you’d ever have a rich and famous granny like Jenna Williams!’ said Emily.

‘We don’t believe a word of it,’ said Harpreet.

‘Your tongue must be really black, telling all those lies,’ said Anya.

Julie didn’t say anything at all – but she looked desperately disappointed.

‘It’s true, really it is!’ I said, my eyes starting to prickle with tears.

‘Oh look, she’s going to cry now! What a baby!’ said Keira. ‘Come on, everyone. We don’t want to play with stupid liars.’

They went off and left me, even Julie. I couldn’t stop the tears spilling down my cheeks then.

Mum saw I’d been crying when she came to collect me from school.

‘What’s up, lovey?’ she said.

I felt my eyes stinging again. ‘Nothing,’ I mumbled.

Julie hurried past, barely looking at me.

‘Oh dear,’ said Mum. ‘Have you fallen out with Julie?’

‘Yes,’ I whispered. ‘Come on. Let’s go *home*.’ I felt as if everyone was staring at me, probably pointing.

‘Well, I’m sure you’ll make it up with her. Or maybe you can pal up with some of the other girls,’ Mum said brightly.

‘No I can’t,’ I said thickly, in floods of tears now. ‘They all hate and despise me and I haven’t got any friends at all.’

‘I’ve got heaps of friends,’ said Jumbo, which made me cry even harder.

‘Why on earth would they hate and despise you, Leonie?’ said Mum.

‘Because they think I’m a liar – and I *am*,’ I howled.

‘Whatever have you said?’ Mum asked, giving me a tissue.

‘I said I had a kitten, so I could be in their Pet Girls Club and I haven’t,’ I wailed.

‘Oh goodness, that’s not a really terrible lie,’ said Mum. ‘Can’t you explain you really *want* a kitten and you just got carried away?’

‘But I told lots of stories about her. And I said . . . I said Jenna Williams was my granny!’

‘What?’ Mum struggled to keep her face straight.

‘You’re laughing at me!’ I said, outraged.

‘Well, you must admit, it is funny. Oh darling, you’re such a ninny. Stop crying now. I’m sure you’ll make some new friends soon,’ said Mum.

‘You can have some of *my* friends if you like,’ said Jumbo.

‘I don’t want any of your silly little friends. I don’t want to make any new friends. I just want to be

best friends with Julie and be in the Pet Girls Club,' I wept.

Mum made smoothies and jam sandwiches when we got home, but I said I didn't want any and flounced off to the bedroom. Jumbo tried to follow me but I shut him out.

I had a good cry all by myself, and then, when I was at the sniffly, hiccupping stage, I switched on my computer and went on the Jenna Williams fan club website to try to cheer myself up a bit. There was a little image of Lulu the kitten, and if you clicked on it she skittered all around the screen, making the cutest little *mew-mew-mew* noises.

I looked up the reviews of the latest Jenna Williams book and then I clicked on her daily blog. She was being very comforting to a girl who had emailed her to say she had no friends.

'Well, I haven't got any friends either,' I muttered.

I sat nibbling my lip, wondering whether to try emailing Jenna Williams myself. I had sent her a couple of messages before, telling her how much I liked her books, but she'd never replied. The website explained that she couldn't reply to everyone, though she did read every single message.

'Read my message then, Jenna Williams,' I said, and started typing.

Dear Jenna Williams,

I feel such a fool writing to you, but I hope you might understand. I was so desperate to be in this Pet Girls Club at my new school that I pretended I had a kitten. I can't have any pets because my little brother has allergies. I pretended I had a kitten just like your Lulu. Then I took a picture of Lulu to school, but this really nasty girl Keira recognized it. They all turned on me then and said I couldn't be in their club, and so I did a mad thing and said you were my granny and that you let me share Lulu. They didn't believe me, and now I don't know what to do. They all know I'm a liar and I feel awful. If I was a girl in one of your books you'd find a way to make it all come right. That's why books are better than real life.

Love from Leonie

I blushed beetroot red as I typed, unable to believe I'd been such an idiot – but I felt just a little bit better when I'd finished. I wasn't absolutely sure Jenna Williams herself would ever read my message, but at least I'd confessed.

I went and had my smoothie and sandwich after all, and then I played with Jumbo because I felt bad that I'd shut him out. I drew him a comic strip about his pet elephant, and then he coloured it in with his wax crayons. He went over the lines and spoiled it rather, but I didn't point this out.

Mum made us spaghetti for supper, and Jumbo and I played the slurp-slurp game and Mum didn't get cross. I still felt pretty miserable though. I felt sick at the thought of facing all the Pet Girls tomorrow morning.

At bedtime I went to switch off my computer and saw that I had a message. It wasn't from one of my friends at my old school. It wasn't from my dad. It wasn't from my real granny in Scotland. *It was a message from Jenna Williams!*

Dear Leonie,

Oh dear, you've got yourself in a bit of a pickle, haven't you! I do understand though. I sometimes pretended things at school and then got into trouble too. It's a blessing to have a vivid imagination – but it can also be a curse!

Whereabouts do you live? I've got a new book coming out shortly called *My Kitten Lulu*, and I'm touring all over the country promoting it. Maybe you could come and see me and meet Lulu?

Love from 'Granny' Williams x

I gave such a scream that Mum came charging into the bedroom, terrified.

'What on earth's the matter now, Leonie? You scared me half to death!'

'Look! I can't believe it! Jenna Williams has replied to me!' I shouted. 'Oh, Mum, she wants me to meet Lulu! Please, please, please, can we go to see her?'

'What? I don't think it can be the *real* Jenna Williams. And we can't go hiking all over the country to go and see her,' said Mum.

'Look, she's doing a big event in London!' I said, stabbing at the screen. 'We could go there. Oh

please, Mum.'

'Please, please, Mum,' said Jumbo sleepily from under his Dumbo duvet, though he didn't really have a clue what I was talking about.

'Well,' said Mum, wavering, 'I suppose we *could* have a day out in London for a treat. All right. We'll go and see your Jenna Williams and her blessed kitten if it means so much to you, Leonie.'

'It means the whole world,' I said solemnly.

I wrote and told Jenna Williams exactly that.

Dear Jenna Williams,

Is it really YOU? I can't believe you've actually replied. You've made me feel soooo much better! Please may I really come and see you when you're in London? And will Lulu really be there too? Will I be able to stroke her?

I don't mind so much not having any friends now. I feel that you are my friend. I'm so glad you're not cross with me for pretending you're my granny. I still wish you were.

Love from Leonie

There was another email waiting for me in the morning.

Dear Leonie,

I'm so glad you've cheered up. I'm doing the London talk at two o'clock. If you and your mum would like to come half an hour early and talk to my publicist, then you can come and see me – and Lulu too. We're both looking forward to meeting you.

Love from Jenna Williams (Granny)

I was bubbling over with happiness – but all my fizz went flat when I had to go into school. I saw Keira first. She mouthed *Liar!* at me and stalked off. Emily and Rosie and Harpreet and Anya looked little anxious, but when Keira glared at them, they all mouthed *Liar!* too.

Julie was late getting to school. She only came through the school gate as the bell started ringing. She ran across the playground. I hung my head. I couldn't bear to see her mouth *Liar!* too.

But she didn't! She took hold of my hand and squeezed it urgently.

'Leonie! I've been thinking. I felt so bad last night. We were all so horrid to you. I think it was because you were so clever at fooling us. But we acted like you'd done something terrible and you haven't *really*. Will you still be friends?'

'Oh, Julie! Yes, I really badly want to be your friend. But I can't be a Pet Girl now, can I?'

'Probably not. But never mind. We could maybe start up our own club, just you and me.'

'Oh yes! Perhaps it could be a book club? Do you like Jenna Williams's books? Oh, Julie, wait till I tell you the most amazing thing about Jenna Williams!' I said.

'She's your granny. Not!' said Julie.

'Yeah, I know, I made that up, I was stupid – but listen, I emailed her and she wrote back to me! She wants me to come and see her and meet her kitten Lulu!' I said excitedly.

Julie didn't look at all impressed. She rolled her eyes and sighed. 'Now listen, Leonie, you're going to have to stop all this pretending stuff. You don't need to any more. We're friends and we'll have our own club. It can be a book club if you like. Just don't start making up stories because everyone will think you're barmy,' said Julie.

She didn't believe me! And if my special new friend Julie didn't believe me, then I didn't have a hope of impressing Keira and all the others. I could always print out the emails – but they could always say I'd written them myself. I decided I'd simply have to shut up about Jenna Williams at school. It seemed infuriating when at last I truly had something to boast about, but it couldn't be helped.

I rather hoped Julie would break off with Keira and the others, but she stayed friends with them too and still spent some playtimes huddled in the corner with them writing in the Pet Book. Keira tore out the page with my drawing of Lulu, crumpled it up and tossed it in the bin. Julie waited until the bell

went and then dashed over and retrieved it. She tried to smooth out the creases as best she could.

~~‘There now. It’s still a lovely drawing,’ she said, giving it to me.~~

‘If you bring me a photo of your dog, Bobo, I’ll draw you a picture of him,’ I offered.

‘That would be great. Or tell you what, why don’t you come round to my house for tea and then you can see him for yourself,’ said Julie. ‘Your mum won’t mind if you go out to tea, will she?’

Mum was completely thrilled when I asked her after school.

‘I’m so pleased you and Leonie are friends, Julie,’ she said. ‘Of course she can go to tea with you. And you must come to tea with us soon.’

‘Oh, that will be great. I’m glad you’re feeling better now,’ said Julie politely.

Mum looked puzzled. I blushed. Luckily Julie didn’t say anything further. I resolved once and for all never ever to tell any fibs again.

I had a *wonderful* time at Julie’s. I especially loved her funny little dog Bobo. He was incredibly naughty, and raced round and round madly, barking his head off – but then he leaped up and licked my face lovingly as if I were an ice lolly! It was quite hard to sketch him because he hardly ever kept still, but I managed to do a quick crayon drawing of him chewing Julie’s dad’s slipper, and the whole family acted as if it were a masterpiece.

I asked Julie back to our place two days later. I was a bit anxious because our new flat’s pretty cramped and we’re having to make do with grotty old carpets and curtains for the moment, and I haven’t even got my own bedroom. Julie’s bedroom is brilliant, a beautiful deep purple, with silver cushions in the shape of stars, and shelves all round two walls (but she hasn’t got as many Jenna Williams books as I have!). Julie wasn’t a bit sniffy about anything though, and she liked my mum and, weirdly, she *adored* Jumbo. I was scared he was being a bit of a pain, hanging around us and nattering away nineteen to the dozen, but Julie seemed to find him really funny.

‘You’re so lucky having a little brother,’ she said.

‘You’re so lucky having a little dog,’ I said. ‘I’ll do a swap if you like. I’ll have Bobo and you can have Jumbo.’

The only awkward moment was when we were sitting near my computer.

‘Shall I just show you my Jenna Williams emails?’ I said hopefully.

Julie sighed. ‘Oh, Leonie!’ she said, frowning.

I decided it might be better not to pursue things. Julie was clearly never going to believe me – and that was really all my own fault.

But wonderfully, it really was true. I had yet another email from Jenna Williams on Friday, the day before her big event in London.

Dear Leonie,

I’m looking forward to seeing you tomorrow. I’ve reserved special seats for you at the theatre. Have you made a friend at your new school yet? If so, do feel free to bring her along to keep you company.

Love from Granny

I *loved* it that she was still calling herself my granny! And now I could bring a friend! I rang Julie straight away. I didn’t say Jenna Williams had specially invited me. I was sure she still wouldn’t believe me.

‘We’ve got special tickets to go to a Jenna Williams talk tomorrow, Julie. Can you come with us? Oh, I do hope you’ll say yes!’ I said.

Julie wasn’t very sure at first, because she usually went to dancing class on Saturday – but she did get excited at the idea of hearing Jenna Williams talk.

‘You really truly have tickets, Leonie?’ she asked cautiously.

‘Really truly, I promise,’ I said.

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